

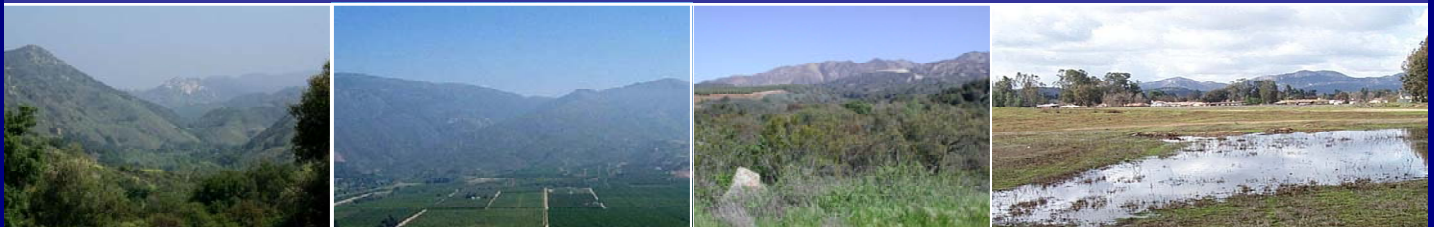
County of San Diego - Parks and Open Space Program
Contributing to the County of San Diego Strategic Plan Environment Initiative
*"Promote natural resource management strategies that ensure environmental preservation,
quality of life, and economic development"*

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North County MSCP Plan Status Update



For the past several months the County has been working with the Wildlife Agencies, stakeholder groups, and consultants to produce a draft of the North County MSCP map that is now ready for a conservation analysis. This is a significant milestone that will allow the County to complete a draft of the plan to circulate for environmental review. The conservation analysis will inform us on how well each habitat and species proposed for coverage is protected by this plan. The following changes have been made to Version 5.3 of the map to get us closer to a final draft: updated vegetation data, added project study area for State Route 76 improvements, adjusted boundaries around tribal lands, added remaining County-owned lands within incorporated areas, and added footprints for hard-line projects. We have nearly completed the revised map and will soon be proceeding with the conservation and environmental analysis.

Other North County MSCP Plan components that have also progressed since our last update are as follows:

- a. Agricultural Issues - County staff will continue to work with the agricultural community on the role of agriculture for conservation value of species to be covered in the plan. The North County MSCP Plan will focus on the need to conserve farmlands that serve as important habitat for covered species with the goal of making expansion of agricultural uses more efficient in areas where sensitive resources may exist. The San Diego County Farming Program (<http://www.SDFarmingProgram.org>) (see article below) is also underway with a goal of addressing the farming needs in San Diego County.
- b. Ramona Vernal Pools - A general strategy has been developed, in consultation with the Wildlife Agencies and stakeholders in Ramona, to identify potential mitigation sites that can be restored and serve as a mitigation for endangered species impacts to vernal pools in the downtown Ramona area.
- c. Wetlands - The County is pursuing wetlands coverage within the North County MSCP Plan area. Wetlands coverage would have significant benefits to the County permitting process, wetlands protection, and overall conservation design of projects.

Following the Conservation Analysis for the draft map, the draft text for the North County MSCP Plan will be completed. The draft North County MSCP Plan and map will then be circulated among interested stakeholders for input. After receiving and considering public input, the North County MSCP Plan and map will undergo an environmental review and analysis - a joint effort between the County and U.S Fish and Wildlife Services to prepare an Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS). The draft EIR/EIS and Draft North County MSCP Plan will be circulated next summer for public review. Our goal is to have a completed plan and environmental documents to the Board of Supervisors by the end of 2006. Please visit http://dplu-mscp.sdcounty.ca.gov//8_nocoup/ncupd.html for more information on the North County MSCP Plan.



East County MSCP Plan Status Update



The East County MSCP Plan is in the early planning stages. In July 2005, the County Department of Planning and Land Use hired Technological Associates International Corporation (TAIC), who is joined by a team of experts from Jones and Stokes and the San Diego Natural History Museum. The consultant team will provide biological and conservation planning services as well as GIS technical support. The consultant team will assist the County and the Wildlife Agencies with the preparation of a Natural Community Conservation Plan/Habitat Conservation Plan for the eastern portion of the unincorporated County.

Community Outreach

In Fall 2005, MSCP Staff provided presentations to community members and interested parties who requested overview presentations, including the communities of Palomar, Julian, Descanso and Campo. Staff also met with the representatives of some of the East County Tribal Nations to provide an overview of the East County MSCP Plan and to obtain feedback and answer questions about the planning process. Tribes are sovereign nations and are not required to participate in the MSCP, however coordination with the Tribes and their conservation efforts is ideal. The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) that were generated at these outreach meetings will be posted on the East County MSCP Plan Website. Please visit our website to view the FAQs: http://dplu-mscp.sdcountry.ca.gov/pub_out/eastcountyplan.html.

Biodiversity in San Diego County

The County of San Diego has been identified as an international "hotspot" of biodiversity. The species in San Diego County alone are more diverse than many states in the U.S. The East County MSCP Study Area includes the desert, foothills and the forest and is home to approximately 254 sensitive plants and animals. The existing South County MSCP Subarea Plan covers 85 species. The North County MSCP Plan proposes to cover between 55 and 65 species.

The East County MSCP Plan Study Area has species that widely roam and have large territories such as the big horn sheep, mountain lions and golden eagles. The biggest difference between the East County MSCP Plan and the South and proposed North County MSCP Plans is that the majority (approximately 75%) of the East County MSCP Plan Study Area is publicly owned. Much of the East County MSCP Project Area is surrounded by land owned by public agencies that have their own conservation plans separate from the East County MSCP Plan. The County is coordinating planning efforts with the various districts/public agencies to determine where and how the conservations plans will be able to complement one another. The East County Project Team has collected biological data and resource management information from several of the public agencies within the study area to assist with the analysis of the preliminary preserve design.

Next Step: Independent Science Advisor Review

The County will be holding workshops with several Independent Science Advisors (ISAs) to review the species predictive model and the habitat evaluation model, conservation planning principles, species coverage and adaptive management. The ISA's will prepare a report with findings and recommendations regarding the preserve design of the East County MSCP Study Area.

The ISAs are technical experts who will review the MSCP Plan along with the Wildlife Agencies as part of the Biological Opinion. The MSCP Plan documents will be peer-reviewed as required by the Natural Community Conservation Program/Habitat Conservation Program and subject to review by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services as far as what species will obtain coverage and which areas are preferred for habitat protection.



Grand Opening of Finney Interpretive Overlook

First Park Construction Project Completed in Otay Valley Regional Park

Article by the County of San Diego
Department of Parks and Recreation

The County of San Diego, City of San Diego, City of Chula Vista and the Otay Valley Regional Park (OVRP) Policy Committee and Citizens Advisory Committee celebrated the grand opening of the Finney Interpretive Overlook in the OVRP on November 15th, 2005.

The Finney Interpretive Overlook provides spectacular vistas of the OVRP. The OVRP is located in the Otay River Valley, which extends from the south eastern edge of the lower San Diego Bay, east about 13 miles to the Otay Lakes Reservoir. The event marks the first park construction project to be completed in the OVRP. By adding an ADA compliant access ramp and walkway to this prominent overlook on the river valley's south side, residents are able to enjoy watching the regional park take shape.

The Finney Interpretive Overlook has two small amphitheaters with interpretive shade structures, benches, tables, and landscaping. The park boasts an aviation design that complements the theme of the surrounding community. For the adjacent Finney Elementary School, the project will also provide an area for outdoor education.

Special artifacts honoring aviation pioneer John Montgomery will be on display for the event, compliments of the San Diego Aerospace Museum.

Finney Interpretive Overlook is located at 3950 Byrd Street, San Diego, CA (Behind Finney Elementary School).



The grand opening of the Finney Interpretive Overlook in the Otay Valley Regional Park was celebrated on November 15, 2005.

Highlighted MSCP Protected Species:

Least Bell's Vireo



The Least Bell's Vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*) is a migratory songbird that lives in riparian woodland habitat. Males and females look alike and are no greater in height than a pocket comb, approximately 6 inches in length with a life span of approximately 7 years. They arrive in Southern California to breed in mid-March, returning to the same tree or shrub each breeding season. The female picks the nest site, and both the male and female help build a cup-shaped nest together, made from leaves, bark, hair and fine grasses. Nests are typically observed on slender branches of shrubs and small trees, usually a few feet off the ground. Egg laying begins two days after the nest is completed, typically with 3 or 4 eggs. Both parents share the incubation, which takes approximately 14 days. Adults care for their young for two weeks and the young stay in the territory for the rest of the breeding season.

Least Bell's Vireo is one of 85 species that are protected by the South County MSCP Subarea Plan. These birds almost faced extinction due to loss and degradation of riparian habitat, and due to an increased abundance of the parasitic brown-headed cowbird. Wetland habitats of Least Bell's Vireo were designated as critical habitat on February 2, 1994 by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. Additionally, there is a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Draft Recovery Plan for this bird which is designed to protect its ecosystem and stabilize and monitor its populations in the following areas: the Tijuana River, Jamul/Dulzura Creeks, Otay River, Sweetwater River, San Diego River, San Luis Rey River, Santa Margarita River, Santa Ana River, Santa Clara River, Santa Ynez River and the Anza Borrego Desert. The Multiple Species Conservation Program Plan that has been adopted for southwestern San Diego County serves as an implementing tool for the recovery plan.



San Diego County Farming Program: October 2005 Listening Sessions



Listening session held in Ramona on October 12, 2005 to learn the public's concerns about the future of farming in San Diego County.

San Diego is considered to be an urban county, yet with more than 5,200 farms, San Diego County has the third highest number of farms of any county in the United States. The farming industry ranks 5th in the San Diego County economy. With a multiplier of 3.5 for every dollar of agricultural product value, the estimate of agriculture's full economic benefit is just under \$5 billion a year. San Diego County farms - 92 percent of which are family-owned - are also a valuable open space and greenbelt resource for residents. Farmers have been adept at responding to changing market conditions by taking advantage of the region's unique climate and geographic resources. However, encroaching urban development, increased water costs, invasion of foreign pests and diseases, and competition from foreign producers have placed continuing pressure on the industry.

San Diego County Farming Program Overview

The County of San Diego, the San Diego County Farm Bureau, the U.C. Cooperative Extension/Farm and Home Advisors, and American Farmland Trust (AFT) are working with landowners and other stakeholders to design and create an innovative Farming Program Plan for the County. This Plan will include an Implementation Manual as a framework for an economically and environmentally sustainable farming industry. While recognizing farms' habitat value for regional conservation, the Plan has a goal of land use policies, programs, tools and incentives to help keep land available and farming profitable. The process to develop the Plan and Implementation Manual will continue through January 2007.

Involvement of the agricultural community is considered to be of utmost importance to the development of the Farming Program Plan. To find out from county farmers and other stakeholders what they considered their most pressing problems and find out their ideas about how to solve them, The County held three "listening sessions," including the one detailed below. The sessions were held in October 2005 in Fallbrook, Ramona, and Valley Center to gather input and allow everyone an opportunity to voice their concerns and provide recommendations. Attendees included farmers in the fruit crop, nursery, vegetable, and livestock/poultry industries. Representatives from CalTrans, Camp Pendleton, and the Fallbrook Chamber of Commerce also attended. The information from the listening sessions will be used by AFT to draft a Farming Program Plan and Implementation Manual for the County of San Diego. Additionally, the County will solicit public input on the draft Plan in April and July 2006.

Listening Session Recap

The listening sessions were hosted by Eric Larson, San Diego County Farm Bureau Executive Director, and facilitated by Michelle Harvey, a meeting facilitator associated with AFT. The meetings were well represented by County staff from the Departments of Agriculture, Weights and Measures, Farm and Home Advisors/U.C. Cooperative Extension, and Planning and Land Use.

At the meetings, attendees were asked to write down their primary and secondary concerns about the future of farming in San Diego County. Concerns from the meetings included:

- **Water Quality:** There are too many stormwater runoff regulations. More educational outreach is needed.
- **Water:** The costs and availability of water in San Diego County is always a concern.
- **Rising cost of Inputs:** The cost of gas, electricity, fertilizers, etc. continue to rise while the profit margins decline.
- **Labor Shortage:** Farmers are concerned about tightened border security and that the cost of insurance to cover workmen's compensation is overpriced. When labor is available, farmers still face farm labor housing regulations and restrictions.



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- **Difficult to Expand Farms:** It is difficult to expand farming operations due to County permitting costs (a slow process, expensive, and too many regulations as compared to other counties and states) and the rising cost of land in general.
- **Agriculture/Urban Interface Issues:** Existing farmers must deal with new developments adjacent to their farms that see existing farms as incompatible to their residential uses.
- **Development Pressures:** Because of the lack of profitability to farm, some farmers must find other uses for their land.
- **Endangered Species:** There is a concern that the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP), particularly within the Pre-approved Mitigation Areas, will cause difficulties for farmers to expand due to mitigation requirements. The goal of the MSCP is to minimize the effects of species protection on farmers.
- **Competition from Foreign Markets:** The competition is forcing the profit margins to decrease.
- **Exotic Pests and Diseases:** Introduction of exotic pests and diseases creates quarantines and increases the cost of doing business due to treatments and loss of revenues.
- **Equity Mechanisms:** Explore including a Purchase of Development Rights and/or Transfer of Development Rights (PDR/TDR) component in the General Plan 2020 update or seek more tax incentives to keep farmers farming in San Diego County.
- **Proposed Minimum Lot Sizes:** 65% of farms in San Diego County are 9 acres or less (with a median farm size of 5 acres). Proposed 40-acre minimum lot sizes in some rural areas in the General Plan 2020 update may preclude farmers from being able to subdivide their land for their children who would take over a portion of the property and continue farming.
- **Research Funding:** More funding is needed for research on new crop developments for San Diego County.
- **Marketing:** Agriculture tourism should be promoted for the County. Additionally, more marketing for locally grown products/labeling is needed.

To review the list of concerns and recommendations discussed at the listening sessions and to learn more about the San Diego Farming Program, please visit www.SDFarmingProgram.org.

As requested by the Descanso Community Planning Group and the Bonsall Community Sponsor Group, County staff provided an overview of the Farming Program and a recap of the October outreach meetings at the Descanso Community Planning Group on October 20, 2005. A similar presentation will be provided by County staff for the Bonsall Community Sponsor Group meeting scheduled for 7 p.m. January 3, 2006 at the Bonsall Community Center, 31505 Old River Road.

Upcoming outreach efforts for the Farming Program include:

April 2006	<i>Provide update and status on the Farming Program Plan and Implementation Manual</i>
July 2006	<i>Draft Plan and Implementation Manual out for Public Review</i>
Sept. 2006	<i>Plan & Implementation Manual presented to Planning Commission for recommendation to Board of Supervisors</i>
Nov. 2006	<i>Plan & Implementation Manual presented to Board of Supervisors for adoption</i>
Jan. 2007	<i>Presentation of adopted Plan & Implementation Manual</i>

If you are interested in learning more on the San Diego County Farming Program, please contact Christine Carta, Land Use/Environmental Planner at (858) 694-3004 or by email at Christine.Carta@sdcounty.ca.gov or Cheryl Monzon, Land Use/Environmental Planner at (858) 694-2964 or by email at Cheryl.Monzon@sdcounty.ca.gov. You can learn more by visiting the San Diego County Farming Program website at www.SDFarmingProgram.org.



West Nile Virus in San Diego: The Straight Talk for Birders

Reprinted from the December 2005 edition of "Sketches" with permission from the San Diego Audubon Society
Written by Mike Matherly

West Nile virus has arrived in San Diego. Virtually every community in the County, from Carlsbad to Chula Vista to El Cajon to Ramona, has reported bird fatalities. For 2005, 142 dead birds have been found, and that is only through October. An Orange County man died of WNV in June. What seemed an East coast problem yesterday is now in your backyard. How great is the danger to our bird population, and more importantly, your family? What measures should be taken to lessen that danger? Must feeders come down? Bird baths drained? Nesting sites avoided? Which mosquito transmits the virus between birds and people, and how can it be identified? As a volunteer organization intimately involved with the carriers of this affliction, how can we help in control efforts?

To apprise us of the gravity of the situation, and answer all of the above questions, researchers from San Diego County Vector Control will address our January meeting. Chris Conlan (entomologist), Mark Webb (biologist), and Greg Slawson (ornithologist) will review the origins, diffusion, and transmission mechanics of this scourge, along with an accounting of specific species affected, your health risk, and preventive measures. An extensive question and answer period will follow their presentation. Come prepared.

West Nile virus emerged in Uganda in 1937, reached Europe in the early 1990s, and the eastern United States in 1999, where it has killed more than 560 Americans since its arrival. Migrating birds brought it into California in just the last three years. In 2004, 830 Californians contracted WNV; 28 of those patients died. That's less than a 1% mortality rate, but the toll among wild birds has been devastating.

Over 230 species of birds have been infected nation-wide, but some have been decimated, particularly crows, jays, and raptors. WNV has killed three-fourths of the crows in the eastern United States. A study just completed in Riverside County reports 85% mortality among its crow population. Yellow-billed magpies, unique to California, have been hammered, and could go extinct. Although the epicenter of bird deaths in our state has been Central California, the numbers are rising in San Diego County, especially among hawks and owls. Please join us for a pointed and pertinent, if not unsettling, evening of straight talk about the virus stalking our passion and jeopardizing our health.

January General Meeting
San Diego Audubon Society
Friday, January 27, 7:30 PM
7:00 PM Socializing; 7:30 Meeting Begins
Location: Tecolote Nature Center
5180 Tecolote Rd, San Diego, CA 92110

**Presentation by Chris Conlan, Mark Webb,
and Greg Slawson**

San Diego County Vector Control
(858) 581-9952



Visit www.sdfightthebite.com
to learn more about
West Nile Virus





Department of Planning and Land Use MSCP Division Personnel Updates

The Department of Planning and Land Use's MSCP Division has added new employees to the team and said goodbye to others. Trish Boaz has left the Department of Planning and Land Use after five years of being an Environmental Resource Manager for the MSCP Division. She has deservedly been promoted as the new Chief of Open Space Management for the Department of Parks and Recreation. Trish will continue to work on issues related to the MSCP including implementation of the South County MSCP Subarea Plan and overseeing the acquisitions, management and monitoring of open space.

Liz Giffen has also left the Watershed Section of the MSCP to care for her first son, Jack. Her position has been filled by Cecilia Padres, who transferred from the Department of Public Works after spending three years working on watershed related issues. Cecilia's past work experiences provide her with a strong background for her new responsibilities: working on the North County Watershed Urban Runoff Management Plans and Proposition 50, a grant to fund watershed related projects throughout the county. The MSCP is excited to have her on the team.

Congratulations to Joe DeStefano on his promotion to Land Use/Environmental Planning Manager for the MSCP Watershed Planning Section. Joe has served as acting Planning Manager since January 2004, providing technical oversight on the County's watershed management plans and stormwater management programs. Prior to taking on this leadership position, Joe worked with the Watershed Program since 2002 and with the Resource Planning Division from 1999 to 2002. Prior to joining the County team, Joe worked for 8 years in the private sector as an environmental analyst and associate civil engineer working on natural resource development and transportation planning projects throughout the U.S. and the Middle East.



The MSCP also welcomes two new student workers: James Wright and Patrick Copley. Patrick Copley is in his last semester at San Diego State and will receive a degree in public administration with an emphasis on city planning. He is thinking of attending graduate school at Point Loma Nazarene to get an MBA and has enjoyed his experience with the County so far. In his free time he likes going to the beach, playing guitar, and playing football with his friends. James Wright is a senior at UCSD majoring in Environmental Chemistry in the Environmental Systems department. He is also a corporal in the US Marine Corps Reserve, where he has been working as an electrician for nearly six years. In his free time James enjoys surfing and playing basketball.

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